

Public Testimony Paper—Medicaid Waiver for those with TBI—January 25th, 2007

Madame Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Mary DeBernardis, a volunteer chairperson of the Bozeman Brain Injury Support Group, (part of the statewide Brain Injury Association of Montana) and a survivor. Almost 7 years ago on a straight dry highway in Bozeman, a young male drunk driver with a blood alcohol of over .23 collided into my VW Beetle. My traumatic brain injury required a year of therapy and months of counseling to keep our long marriage intact. It was through sheer luck that I found out about the local support group. Part of my mission today is to encourage the Bozeman Deaconess Hospital ER to hand out two simple forms regarding the Resource Facilitation Service to those diagnosed with a head injury, no matter how minor. The Resource Facilitation Service in my opinion is valuable not only for survivors of TBI, but also for their families. I would encourage you to fund a full-time resource facilitator.

Also, the Medicaid Waiver program makes it possible for one of our members to reside at Liberty Place—a wonderful alternative for those with brain injuries to have a wholesome life that would allow residents to live more independently. He was afflicted with encephalitis as a young man working his first professional job a few years after his college graduation. Before Liberty Place, his only other alternative was a nursing home or continue to live with his parents. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of four women with varied health-care backgrounds who recognized that little was being done for those who would require a greater level of care, Liberty Place exists today.

We have other members who have received housing, food, and medical benefits under the Medicaid Waiver Program, without which, they would not survive. Many of our members did not expect or plan for the sudden disruption in their lives as a result of a traumatic brain injury. To quote information taken from the Liberty Place website, ninety percent of brain injuries occur as a result of motor vehicle accidents.

Although I had no need for Medicaid services, I can relate to the pain and suffering endured by other families. When those other families do not have adequate financial/medical resources, the Medicaid Waiver program can mean the difference between life and death. Indeed the brother of one of our members committed suicide because of the long wait to get services in another state that had inadequate Medicaid services.

Montana has over 10,000 people with brain injuries, and ranks second in the nation for incidence of brain injury. 10 percent of head injuries in the US are sports related.

There are twice as many incidences of brain injuries than the combined total of cases of multiple sclerosis, breast cancer and HIV. Acquired brain injury knows no social, religious or racial boundaries. Every 15 seconds, one person in the US sustains a brain injury.

Brain injury is the leading cause of injury and death in children and young adults. It does not always happen to someone else. Indeed, do not assume that any of you assembled here today will survive the next 24 hours. Instead try to live each day to your fullest—something I gently remind our wonderful 2 daughters. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you on behalf of those who cannot be here.

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